

I received the attached letter from a constituent and ask that it be posted to the Annotated Warrant under Article 38.

John D. Leone TMM P8

Article 38 - Size Really Does Matter

Dear Town Meeting Members,

The original proponents of Article 38 put no limitation on the size of the duplex structure that could be built, other than complying with the existing lot setbacks and other dimensional restrictions in our bylaw. For a typical 6000 sq ft lot in the R1 district, this would have allowed structures with a footprint of about 2200 sq ft, or a total floor area of 5500 sq ft. This is a massive building, larger than 99.5% of the single family homes in Arlington.

The Redevelopment Board modified the warrant article, adding a size restriction of 1850 sq ft of 'heated space' per unit, or 3700 sq ft total. The thinking was that this would create two 'starter home' sized units. This is a well-meaning intention, but it falls short of its goal.

The concept of a 1850 sq ft condo unit, with 3 or 4 bedrooms and likely costing \$1M or more, is well beyond most people's idea of a 'starter home'. In fact, half of all the single family homes in our R1 district are smaller than 1850 sq ft. Far more appropriate would be a maximum size of 1430 sq ft. 20% of the single family homes in Arlington have a finished area of 1430 sf or less. This would correspond to a typical Cape with a foundation of 34' x 24' and a full shed dormer on the second floor. The median assessed value of these smaller homes is \$640K.

So where does this notion of a 1850 sq ft 'starter home' come from? It has been plucked from the State's 40R regulations regarding starter home districts, specifying the maximum size of homes in this district. What was not taken from 40R is the provision that at least 20% of these homes be affordable to households earning 100% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which currently corresponds to homes costing \$400K or less. There is no such affordability requirement in Article 38. The only kind of housing it will provide are duplex condos affordable for those making in excess of 200% of AMI. Nowhere in the Master Plan will you find a goal of providing more housing choice for this economic group. Our stated goals as a community are to increase our stock of housing for seniors and lower income households.

Another requirement of the 40R definition of starter home districts is that any ADUs are to be limited to just 600 sq ft. Article 38 as it stands would allow 900 sq ft ADUs to be appended to each unit, creating a total structure of as much as 5500 sq ft. As noted before, this is a massive building, larger than 99.5% of the single family homes in Arlington. Even in today's market, developers are rarely building single family homes this huge. But it is profitable to build two families of this size, and that is what is already happening in our R2 districts (witness 63-65 Lancaster Rd).

In considering the merits of Article 38, there should be no illusions that it will increase some sort of 'missing middle' in Arlington's housing supply. Rather, it will gradually erode our existing stock of modest, smaller single family homes, and convert them into duplex condos each costing more than the single family they replaced.

Everyone agrees that Arlington and the region have a shortage of affordable housing. But Article 38 is not a way to solve that problem. It is more of an empty, feel good gesture, deluding ourselves that we are somehow doing something about the regional problem by building million dollar condos. It is slightly analogous to addressing a bread shortage by suggesting 'let them eat cake'. A chief proponent writes of it being a 'moral imperative' for Arlington. Our moral imperative is not to build \$1M condos for the wealthy, but rather focus our efforts on how to build and retain housing for lower income households. Trickle down housing is not an effective path to more affordable housing. It instead accelerates gentrification and reduces our diversity.

Don Seltzer, 50 year resident
Irving St